

**U.S. Department of State
U.S. Embassy Bucharest
Notice of Funding Opportunity**

The Embassy of the United States in Romania announces an open competition for past participants (“alumni”) of U.S. government-funded and U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to submit applications to the 2023 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF 2023). We seek proposals from teams of at least two alumni that meet all program eligibility requirements below. Exchange alumni interested in participating in AEIF 2023 should submit proposals to BucharestPDGrants@state.gov by midnight Wednesday, March 1, 2023.

A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AEIF provides alumni of U.S. sponsored and facilitated exchange programs with funding to expand on skills gained during their exchange experience to design and implement innovative solutions to global challenges facing their community. Since its inception in 2011, AEIF has funded nearly 500 alumni-led projects around the world through a competitive global competition. This year, AEIF 2023 will support United States’ commitment to working with our partners around the world to advance strategic priorities.

The Embassy will accept public service projects proposed and managed by teams of at least two (2) alumni that support one of the following priorities:

- Further regional and international peace and security
 - media literacy
 - counter disinformation, misinformation, fake news
 - cybersecurity education
- Promote Euro-Atlantic standards of democracy, rule of law and minority inclusion
 - rule of law
 - democracy
 - human rights, non-discrimination
 - minority inclusion
 - women empowerment
 - civics education
 - civic participation
 - trafficking in persons prevention
 - free, independent, and responsible press
 - youth leadership
- Strengthen transatlantic economy

- entrepreneurship promotion

B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Announcement posted: November 1, 2022

Closing date for applications: March 1, 2023

Funding type: Small grant awards

Decision date: dependent on Alumni Affairs decision

Expected size of individual awards: Between \$5,000 to \$25,000

Program Performance Period: Proposed programs should be completed in 12 months or less.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants:

The following individuals are eligible to apply:

- Applicants must be alumni of a U.S. government-funded exchange program (<https://alumni.state.gov/list-exchange-programs>) or a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program (<https://j1visa.state.gov/>).
- Projects teams must include teams of at least two (2) alumni.
- Alumni who are U.S. citizens may not submit proposals, but U.S. citizen alumni may participate as team members in a project.
- Alumni teams may be comprised of alumni from different exchange programs and different countries.
- Applications must be submitted by exchange alumni. Not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions are not eligible to apply in the name of the organization but can serve as partners for implementing project activities.

2. Cost Sharing

Inclusion of cost share is not a requirement of this opportunity.

3. Grant Program Area:

Proposals must address listed priorities. Proposals that do not address the theme as outlined in the program objectives will be deemed ineligible. All project activities must take place in Romania.

4. Other Eligibility Requirements

NOFO: AEIF 2023

If the grant will be processed with an individual, that individual is not required to have a UEI number (Unique Entity Identifier) and be registered in SAM.gov. However, should the grant be processed with an organization that is a partner in the project, that organization must have a UEI, as well as a valid registration on www.SAM.gov. Organizations must have a commitment to equal opportunity employment practices and to non-discrimination practices regarding beneficiaries, without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation.

C. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Address to Request Application Package

Application and budget forms are available at <https://ro.usembassy.gov/education-culture/nofo/>

Content and Form of Application Submission

Applications and budgets must be submitted using the official AEIF 2023 proposal and budget forms.

Please follow all instructions below carefully. Proposals that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or fail to comply with the stated requirements will be ineligible.

Please ensure:

- The proposal clearly addresses the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity
- The proposal addresses all questions in the official AEIF 2023 proposal form
- All documents are in English
- The budget is in U.S. dollars and is submitted using the designated AEIF budget form
- All pages are numbered

The following documents are required:

1. Mandatory application forms

- a. AEIF 2023 Application Form
- b. AEIF 2023 Budget Form
- c. SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance – organizations) or SF-424-I (Application for Federal Assistance --individuals) at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-individual-family.html>
- d. SF424A (Budget Information for Non-Construction programs) at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-individual-family.html>

- e. SF424B (Assurances for Non-Construction programs) at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-individual-family.html>
2. **Proposal:** The proposal should contain enough information that anyone not familiar with it would understand exactly what the alumni team wants to do. Proposals must include the following:

Proposal Summary: Short narrative that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.

Alumni Team Information: There must be at least two exchange alumni team members involved for a project to be considered for funding. Along with the names and contact information, describe the role each team member will have in the project and their experience, qualifications, and ability to carry out that role. Indicate what proportion of their time will be used in support of the project.

Problem Statement: Clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed and why the proposed project is needed.

Program Goals and Objectives: The “goals” describe what the project is intended to achieve. The “objectives” refer to the intermediate accomplishments on the way to the goals. These should be achievable and measurable.

Local Program Partners: List partners who will support your project. Please note if you have an existing relationship with your partner organization(s) and describe their role in the project. If you do not have an existing relationship, explain how you anticipate establishing a partnership with the organization(s).

Program Methods and Design: A description of how the project is expected to solve the stated problem and achieve the stated goal.

Proposed Project Schedule and Timeline: The proposed timeline for project activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan: The Monitoring and Evaluation component of the proposal will outline in detail how the proposal’s activities will advance the program’s goals and objectives (listed above). A strong proposal will include:

- The project should set out a plan for informing the Embassy periodically and specifically regarding events so that the Embassy can participate or amplify with traditional and/or social media, if appropriate and in furtherance of the project’s goals.
- Any outcomes the grantee expects to occur because of their program. Outcomes could include change in knowledge, awareness, and attitudes; improved quality of services; increased capacity at a school, group; etc.

Proposals should also include how the grantee will know those outcomes are occurring (surveys, interviews, observations, etc.). Simply stating number of participants or people reached is not considered an outcome. A strong methodology for measuring impact will be favorably considered.

- For example: If the program expects that a teacher-training program will improve the skills of a teacher, a proposal may explain the skills the teacher would gain and plan to perform a survey before the program and a survey following the program that would show a change in understanding due to the program.
- A plan to include the grantee's reflection of how their program contributed to the program's goals. As applicable, a strong final report would include success stories, behaviors changed, lessons learned, and results obtained.

Sustainability: Explain how you plan to continue the program beyond the grant period, or the availability of other resources, if applicable.

Communication Plan: Explain how you will promote your project. Include social media, websites, print news, or other forms of media you intend to use to share information about your project to beneficiaries and the public. Communications should include AEIF 2020 and U.S. Embassy branding. These include training materials, materials for recipients or materials to communicate or promote with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity under an agreement.

- 3. Budget Justification Narrative:** Applicants must submit a detailed budget and budget narrative justification utilizing the template provided. Line item expenditures should be listed in the greatest possible detail. Budgets shall be submitted in U.S. dollars and final grant agreements will be conducted in U.S. dollars.

Budget Restrictions: AEIF 2023 does not support the following activities or costs, and the selection committee will deem applications involving any of these activities or costs ineligible:

- Airfare to or from the United States and its territories
- Activities that take place in the United States and its territories
- Sustained staff salaries, office space, and overhead/operational expenses exceeding 10% of total operational costs
- Large items of durable equipment or construction programs
- Alcohol, excessive meals, refreshments, or entertainment
- Refreshments and meals must not exceed 10% of the total grant amount
- Academic or scientific research
- Charitable or development activities or the provision of direct social services to a population

- Support or opposition of partisan political activity or lobbying for specific legislation or programs
- Programs that support specific religious activities
- Fund-raising campaigns
- Programs intended primarily for the growth or institutional development of the organization
- Venture capital, for-profit endeavors, or charging a fee for participation in the project
- Individual scholarships
- Personal development
- Social travel/visits
- Gifts or prizes
- Programs that duplicate existing programs

D. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Evaluation Criteria: The U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Sections will use the criteria outlined below to evaluate all applications. After this initial review, the Public Affairs Section will submit the top proposals from their country to the global AEIF 2023 competition. The proposals will be reviewed by a Selection Committee made up of regional and exchange program experts located at the Department of State in Washington, DC. Panelists will use the criteria below to review and evaluate applications.

Relevance to Application Theme

The proposal provides sufficient information on how the activities will support the theme(s) of the competition. The narrative explains any relevant local context the D.C. Selection Committee may not be aware of in relation to this project. Proposed project ideas must be public diplomacy in nature (i.e. not development or military).

Purpose and Summary, Description, and Implementation Plan

When developing the purpose, summary, description, and implementation plan, applicants should aim to make all descriptions clear, concise, and compelling. Reviewers will judge the proposals based on the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the community where it is undertaken. Does the project address an important gap of understanding or need? If the aim of the project is achieved, how will existing knowledge or practice be improved? What audience do the applicants hope to reach with this project? How many will participate? How will they be selected?

Degree of Alumni Involvement

Projects must include the involvement of at least two (2) exchange alumni. They may be the project team leaders or collaborate directly with PAS in formulating the project.

More than two alumni may comprise the team, however, the minimum is two. As the team leaders, the alumni must be closely involved in project planning, implementation, etc. Applicants should ensure that the proposal includes the following information for each alumni team member: first name, last name, e-mail address, exchange program, country of citizenship, and roles and responsibilities.

Participation and Support from Local Partners

The proposal demonstrates buy-in and support from the community where the project will take place. Local partner involvement is a strong sign that there is community support and that the project will engage a broad array of experts, such as subject matter experts, community centers, academic institutions, businesses, local/national government, non-governmental organizations, American Spaces, etc.

Evaluation and Impact of the Project

A monitoring & evaluation (M&E) plan is pivotal to project implementation and important tracking progress towards the project's objectives and goals. An M&E plan should consider the data needed to effectively monitor progress toward specific outputs and outcomes as well as how that data collection will be accomplished. Well-crafted indicators should be used to understand a program's progress toward the desired results. An M&E plan should be reviewed for the following:

- Completion
- Applicability and logic of objectives and indicators
- Clear approach to monitoring
- Adherence to SMART criteria
- Feasibility of baselines and targets
- Data quality plan
- Capacity to implement plan

Sustainability

Have the applicants considered how the project will continue to have positive impact after the end of the project.

Communication, Media, and Outreach Plan

The project should include a clear plan and timeline for how and when the team will share information about the project. It is important to ensure that the U.S. Embassy gets recognition throughout the process, if circumstances permit.

Budget and Budget Narrative

The budget and narrative justification are sufficiently detailed. Costs are reasonable in relation to the proposed activities and anticipated results. The budget is realistic, accounting for all necessary expenses to achieve proposed activities. The results and proposed outcomes justify the total cost of the project. Budget items are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

Disclaimer: This notice is subject to availability of funding. U.S. Embassy in Romania does not guarantee availability of funding by receiving applications under this announcement.

E. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

The grant award will be written, signed, awarded, and administered by the Grants Officer. The assistance award agreement is the authorizing document and it will be provided to the recipient for review and signature by email. The recipient may only start incurring program expenses beginning on the start date shown on the grant award document signed by the Grants Officer.

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Department of State has no obligation to provide any additional future funding. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the discretion of the Department of State.

Issuance of this NOFO does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the U.S. government, nor does it commit the U.S. government to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals. Further, the U.S. government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received.

Payment Method: Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)

Reporting Requirements: Recipients will be required to submit financial reports and program reports. The award document will specify how often these reports must be submitted.

F. FEDERAL AWARDED AGENCY CONTACTS

Questions about the grant application process should be directed to: BucharestPDGrants@state.gov.